

The legend of 'White Wing'

Lorraine Croswell's book about an Indian princess tells a real life love story teeming with local history

By Mara Stine
Post-Record Staff

Lorraine Croswell, who has lived in Washougal all her life, comes from a long line of writers, so it's no big surprise that the octogenarian has combined her hereditary calling with local history to write "White Wing, Princess of the Columbia Gorge."

"It's not a very big book, but it's been attracting a lot of attention," she says, sitting at a table in her home just south of Mount Norway.

"I had 100 printed and they sold right away," says the woman with brilliant blue eyes behind a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. "So, now I've got another 100 and a few of them have sold already. I'm surprised they're selling as fast as they are."

Croswell grew up right over where the homes of Rolling Meadows are being built and remembers walking the streets of Washougal — streets with names such as Durgan, Ough, Love and Gracia impressed in the corners of the cement sidewalks.

Her mother, Harriet Markham Gil, who wrote action-filled stories that appeared in boys' magazines across the country, taught Croswell how to write and her father was a gardener specializing in dahlias.

She lived next door to the Gibbons, who were one of the town's two founding families, and along with her brother and sister, Croswell remembers hearing the story of White Wing, a Native American princess who married an English seaman.

Many of the town's 500 residents knew the princess, who died in 1911, and the legend lived on through them.

"Back then, there weren't any wars or anything," Croswell says, explaining that people were fearful of Indians in the Northwest, whites and natives got along for the most part. "But sometimes the Indians would

get into trouble with the white people and White Wing was kind of a go-between."

Renowned for her beauty, White Wing's real name was Huchney, which means white butterfly. It was customary for Native American women to give birth outside, where they were surrounded by nature, and the child was named after the first thing they heard.

During her childhood, she heard many stories about the princess, but small details and historical facts were lost or changed in the translation.

"I was always interested, but when I got older, I realized that a lot of things written about her weren't historically accurate," she says. "That's kind of what bothered me. I'd heard stories from both sides [from natives and white settlers], but for years it wasn't quite right."

As a young woman, Croswell met the princess' granddaughter, Gracia Ough Jones, who worked at the bank.

"I thought she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen," Croswell recalls. "And when I mentioned it to the old timers, they said that's because she looked like White Wing."

The two became friends and over the years, Croswell heard a lot of the history surrounding White Wing from her granddaughter.

"I knew that White Wing was the same type of person as Gracia," she

says. "They looked the same and acted the same, so she was my inspiration."

Croswell had always planned on writing about the life of White Wing, but didn't get around to it until 10 years ago.

"The main thing was getting enough time to," she says.

She researched and wrote the book off and on, spending hours in Vancouver and Portland libraries getting historical background on the princess. She even got some books from Boston.

"The best part was that I already knew quite a bit about her," she says, adding that her research was mainly historical because Ough Jones told her personal information — the kind of stuff that books don't supply.

"She told me quite a bit about White Wing. According to her granddaughter, she was treated like a princess," Croswell says, adding that she had slaves and was used to people doing what she told them to do.

And it was her royal status that made an already romantic encounter with her future husband even more so.

White Wing was the daughter of her tribe's chief, whose nickname was Sly Horse — a hybrid of his original name, Schly-housh, which Anglos couldn't pronounce. She lived a life of privilege and met her future husband, Richard Ough, when the Englishman and petty officer with Hudson's Bay Company, arrived along with Dr. John McLoughlin in her village to trade for furs.

"He liked the country and fur trading here," Croswell says. "Dr. McLoughlin took him up the river in a canoe and they stopped the canoe in Washougal and were trading furs with the Indians when they saw White Wing."

Ough returned to the village, which was on land that is now Washougal, and befriended many men of the Shoshone Nation, who took him hunting — a sport he especially enjoyed. And all the while, he visited with White Wing, whom he called Betsy, and before long, they fell in love.

But when Ough asked Chief Schly-housh if he could marry the princess, her father refused.

"He didn't like the idea of a strange white man marrying her," Croswell says. "And, being a princess, she was supposed to marry a chief and he didn't know what status he had."

There was also the possibility that Ough would take her to England and he'd never see her daughter again. Or Ough could do what many foreign



One of the pages in Lorraine Croswell's photo album, which is filled with information and pictures about local Native Americans and White Wing, is a drawing of the boat Richard Ough, the husband of White Wing, returned from England on after three to four years away from her. Staff photo by Mara Stine.

acres — land that White Wing's tribe lived on. Although it was home to her people before the Pilgrims ever landed at Plymouth Rock, the acquisition of land proved that he intended to keep his

White Wing stayed with McLoughlin while her husband was in England. Just getting there by ship took a year and once he got there, Hudson's Bay Company sent him on a year-long voyage south before he was able to return to the Northwest, which took another year.

The princess was known as a gifted doctor who helped pioneer women give birth and she had 10 children between 1839 and 1863. Their second child, Grace Marie, married Joseph Latourell, a young Frenchman from New York who came west by way of Cape Horn. In 1857, they homesteaded near Oregon's Rooster Rock, just across the Columbia from Gracia's parents, who took quick canoe trips to visit. The 242-foot waterfall known as Latourell Falls is on the homestead.

Their youngest son, John, married a woman named Harriet Elizabeth Dungan and they had two children, one of whom was Gracia Ough.

White Wing died in 1911, but her age was unknown. She thought she was 111, but most people figured she was probably closer to 105, which would mean she was born in 1806. The princess is buried in the old part of Washougal Cemetery next to her husband, who died in 1884. Their grave

site is marked by a white stone. Her father is buried in the old cemetery for both natives and Caucasians at North Bonneville.

Ough Jones read some of Croswell's book before she died at the age of 91 in May of 1995.

"She had read over half the story and liked it," Croswell says.

Among the memories she shared with Croswell were ones of her father, who was proud of the Indian heritage his mother passed on to him, taking her on long horseback rides from Washougal to Yakima. Along the way, he'd point out various rock formations and tell her the Native American names for different places and big waterfalls across the river.

Overall, Croswell is pleased with the book — which she dedicated to Ough Jones, her son Ray and his wife Dolores — but said, as is the case with any piece of writing, there are things the author could have added or left out.

"I was never a writer — I just thought this needed to be written," she says.

"White Wing, Princess of the Columbia Gorge" can be purchased at Two Rivers Heritage Museum, 1-16th St., in downtown Washougal. It costs \$13.95.



White Wing
Princess of the Columbia Gorge

This portrait of White Wing was illustrated by Croswell based on the facial features of Gracia Ough Jones, White Wing's granddaughter.

white men did — marry an Indian woman, have children and then desert the family when he returned home to marry a white woman. Sometimes the tribe wouldn't take the native woman back and she'd kill herself.

"That was done quite often," Croswell says.

However, the chief saw how much his daughter wanted to marry the man, so he made Ough promise that he'd always live with her in Washougal.

As soon as the border between Canada and the United States was established, Ough got a land grant of 640

acres — land that White Wing's tribe

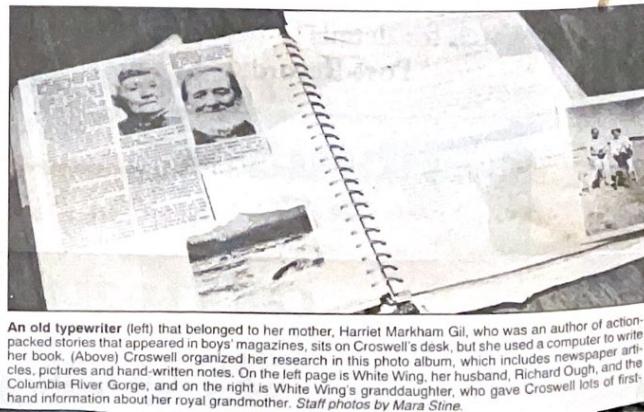
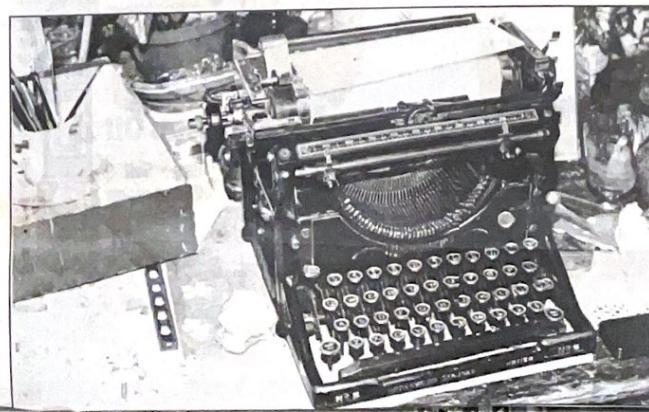
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An old typewriter (left) that belonged to her mother, Harriet Markham Gil, who was an author of action-packed stories that appeared in boys' magazines, sits on Croswell's desk, but she used a computer to write her book. (Above) Croswell organized her research in this photo album, which includes newspaper articles, pictures and hand-written notes. On the left page is White Wing, her husband, Richard Ough, and the right page is information about her royal grandmother. Staff photos by Mara Stine.